



WICKED YOUNG WRITER AWARDS

PATRON: HRH THE DUCHESS OF CORNWALL

In partnership with



2016

**18-25 Age Category
Finalists Entries**

18-25 AGE CATEGORY

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Duplicate

By Claire Joicey

She walked around the corner at exactly the same time as the church bells started to ring. Her blonde head was bowed against the icy wind, flecks of snow still glistening on her hair and jacket. Jenny clutched her bags of shopping more tightly as an enormous group of young girls swarmed past her, all giggling excitedly and pointing across the street. She turned her head, pushing the scarf further up her face with her free hand. A large shop front window opposite them was displaying a huge, blown up version of next year's calendar. Five men were pictured on the month of January, their shirts slightly opened, and all five pairs eyes barrelling straight down the lens. Jenny's eyes moved back to the road, her breath billowing in front of her as clouds of steam. Snow had started to fall again, settling on the already white ground, now illuminated a deep orange by the many street lamps, lining the pavement like soldiers. She felt the cold flakes hit the small part of her face that was bare and start to solidify. She brushed her forehead with one gloved hand, the other locked to her side by the two enormous shopping bags. Her eyes flickered over the many faces that passed her. Screaming children, harried mothers, business men on their last walk back home before the holidays; but she saw no glimpse of red among them. All the expressions she caught sight of were filled with the same emotions; excitement and laughter, odd multi coloured flashes darting across all the many faces from the twinkling lights

on the other side of the street. The wafting aroma of the market was starting to become more prevalent too. Jenny raised her head slightly, and sniffed. The warm scent of mulled wine and mince pies drifted through her brain and made her momentarily pause. She thought of Peter, of how he would be packing up his stall. She strained her ears, desperate to hear his voice among the many shouts, but she could not.

“Watch it!”

Something heavy collided with her back. She spun around and found herself looking straight up into a dark angry face that was glaring down at her with a look of intense irritation.

“Sorry!” she muttered. “I wasn’t thinking!”

The man’s look suddenly, in a split second, turned to horror. He hurried past her, a beautiful dark woman on his arm, both turning briefly to stare back at her. As they passed, Jenny briefly heard a single word:

“ - scar - ”

She knew immediately what must have happened. Holding her free hand up to her face, she felt the scarf around her chin and cursed silently to herself, pushing it back up under her eyes. Her cheek twitched from the cold that had briefly hit it, a small twinge of pain tingling through the raw skin. She could not let that happen again. Not here. Not now.

She took a few steps forward. “Shit!”

The ground slid from under her feet before she could stop it. She threw out her arms and flailed wildly, trying to stop herself falling. The bags of presents fell and collapsed onto the pavement, spilling out all over the street. Jenny landed hard on the icy kerb falling straight onto her left wrist and a soft ‘crack’ sounded around the street, unheard by the many shoppers around her. For a few seconds she lay, winded and breathing heavily dimly aware of the many footfalls crunching past her in the snow.

“Are you alright?”

She saw the long curls of dark red hair and heard the light breathing before she saw the face. Her mind, confused by the now thickly falling snow, blanked for a few moments and then, glancing up, she whispered:

“Nice evening to make snow angels?”

“Yes,” came the reply. “But even better in January.”

The tiny parcel had changed hands before anyone could notice, a small flash of silver wrapping that shot through the air like a bullet.

The woman picked up the remaining parcels and packed them into

Jenny's bags. Jenny went to stand by pushing herself up, but an agonising wave of pain shot straight through her wrist.

"Shit!" she swore again, quietly.

The red-headed woman stood, and offered Jenny her hand, which Jenny took with her own uninjured one, and pulled up her to a stand. For a few moments, their hands remained together in a handshake, and Jenny looked straight into the pale face and dark eyes, a thousand words connecting the two of them just for a minute, and then the handshake was broken and the woman turned, hurrying away along the street into the oncoming blizzard, the small bulge just visible in her coat pocket. !

Jenny turned and opened her hand. The small piece of paper was wedged between two of her fingers. Cradling her injured arm against her middle, she opened it awkwardly suddenly aware that the church bells had stopped ringing, an eerie silence spreading over the street. One single word was printed there. One single black-ink word that sat starkly against the shocking white background. !

RUN!

She heard the gunshot a second too late. The bang echoed around the crowded street, and Jenny turned to see the now lifeless body fall in slow motion. A trickle of blood began to ooze from the pale temple, staining the white ground around it and mixing eerily with the flame red hair.

Almost There

By Ellie Courtman

My vision was fragmented, disconnected, snippets of memories spliced with the screams of gunfire. I lay face down at the bottom of the shell hole, the stench of churned up earth clogging my lungs, setting thickly in the back of my throat.

"John?"

A wave of relief washed over me at the sound of Peter's voice. He lay beside me, staring at my leg, concern etched into his muddied features. It was twisted, shards of shrapnel protruding fiercely from the mangled mess of flesh and bone.

"Come on," he said, shaking my arm. "We've got to get you back."

I crawled, fingers digging into the cold, wet mud as I dragged myself forward. Coughing violently, I choked on the fog that shrouded my vision, cocooning me in its suffocating grasp. I reached out, resting my hand upon something solid and sticky to my left - not mud. I reeled backwards, heart stuttering as my eyes fell upon the lifeless form of a young boy; his body twisted like a rag doll, chest an elaborate meshwork of red thread.

I felt Peter's arms on me then.

"Easy now, Johnny boy," he said, gripping my shoulders tightly. "You hang in there, you hear me, keep going...you're almost there."

You're almost there. Peter had so often uttered those words to me they'd become somewhat of a mantra, - teaching me to climb trees, to read, how to pick a lock with nothing but a pen knife. 'Almost there John,' he'd say. We'd been friends since I was five. My mother was a housekeeper for his father, and more often than not, she'd take me with her. He'd sneak me cakes and sweets when no one was looking. I'd make him feel less lonely.

I sobbed and retched up nothing.

My clothes snagged on barbed wire as I continued forward, breath scrabbling out in short, laboured gasps. Muffled explosions sent sharp convulsions through my body, the sound like waves breaking violently on white cliffs in my ruptured ear drums. Bullets speared the ground, spluttering spit balls of brown sludge like wind tearing white soapy spray from the towering peaks of surfs. I lay frozen, transfixed by the fierce motion. My mind recalled the waves I used to run into as a child, how they'd engulf me and drag me up the beach gasping for air.

I'd always loved the sea. Peter and I would race down the beach after school, pebbles crunching under our feet before resting upon the softness of weathered sand. We'd climb over the cliff rubble, the spray of salt licking our heels before we'd scour ourselves in it completely. Peter would leap gracelessly into the water, a splash of ungainly limbs and muffled laughter. My eyes would follow the golden streak of his body as he swam beneath the icy depths, vanishing for minutes at a time before breaking the surface like a seal, spraying salt water in my face and smiling mischievously. He looked so young then; sunrays picking out droplets of water clinging to his skin like shiny scales.

Peter clutched my hand, anchoring all thoughts to the present.

War had wearied him, his face an unusual mix of both youth and age. I saw a glimpse of it then, something behind those hazel eyes- a loneliness, a flicker of incompatible sorrow like an icy flame. He smiled; face scrunching

up, eyes crinkling at the sides and it was gone.

I was almost there.

“John!” I heard someone yell. “John!”

It was Daniel, a boy from our barracks. Reaching out, he clutched the dirtied material of my jacket and dragged me roughly into the trench. Peter clambered in behind.

“John! Can you hear me? John!” Daniel yelled.

I glanced at Peter slumped against the mud. He was staring at me with sad eyes.

“Peter...someone help Peter,” I mumbled incoherently. I felt light headed; the stench of rotting sand bags filling my nostrils.

“Pete-”

“Peter’s not here! John. He’s not come back!” Daniel yelled. “I’m sorry.”

Only now did I notice it; the paleness of Peter’s skin, the hollow of his eyes, the bullet holes peppered across the planes of his chest. A convulsion of pain shot through my body as Daniel’s hand clamped down on my leg, and I writhed in agony, a scream clawing violently from my throat. I screamed again and again, the sound ripping mercilessly through the deafening silence of war. When I turned back, Peter was gone.

Winner of the 18-25 Age Category

Unforgettable Sound

By Fabiana Conte Luque

There was only the constant ticking of the clock on the wall. It was making me more anxious than I already was.

My dad wasn’t his cordial self. This time he was just giving an uncomfortable shy smile to our guests. My mother was looking at him intently. In my mind I could hear her saying: “Don’t sit smiling like an idiot Asif. Say something to them!”

I tensed my lips to avoid my cheeks from rising.

“Well Sana, look at him. Aren’t you lucky?” my dad finally said.

How could I know yet? My head had been down since their arrival and I hadn't been able to look at the boy who was sitting across the table. What if he was the ugliest boy I've ever seen? What if he smelled like the kids that play in the garbage? Could I get used to that?

I inhaled deeply. I was ready for whatever I'd have in front of me. But when I raised my eyes all I saw was the crown of his head. Why is he not looking at me? Is he as shy as I am?

His father, embarrassed, slapped him on his back. The boy jumped in surprise at the aggressive gesture.

I gasped, put my head down again and bit my lower lip hard. I closed my eyes, inhaling and exhaling profoundly three times. As always, it helped.

I could feel the disapproving eyes of my mother on my neck. It had been a close call, but I managed to control myself and raised my head again.

This time he raised his as well.

Then I met for the first time the greenest pair of eyes I had ever seen. My amber pair was filled with surprise and wonder from this ridiculous situation. In his there was boredom and a small amount of anger. They were moving in small zig zags, up and down. He was trying to make out my face. An impossible task. I could sense his frustration.

But how lucky was I? Most girls I knew never had an opportunity like this, and...

His sudden movement interrupted my thoughts. He stood up with such speed that he pushed the small table between us hitting me in my stomach and spilling the hot tea over my parents.

"It's unfair! Why can't see her? It's stupid!" he screamed at his father.

His father stood up, bringing more hot tea over my parents, and grabbed him by his left ear, which made him squeal in pain.

Despite the chaos I noticed one thing: I am not alone.

"If he sees you he'll think you are not worthy Sana. His family is very strict," Dad had said.

"But look Dada," I wanted to say, smiling, "He thinks all this is as stupid as I think it is."

I pressed my arms around my belly, and pressed my forehead to my knees. Not because of the small pain the table had caused but because something urgent was happening. I could feel it bubbling inside. I tried to breathe. It didn't help. My belly muscles were twitching and my body started to shake. I was fighting against it as mother always used to say. My throat was burning,

my face distorted. I couldn't avoid it. My back switched up and my head tilted to the ceiling. My mouth opened and my characteristic loud laugh bounced around the room. I swung forwards and backwards. And it was hard to gasp for air with the fabric of my burqa covering my mouth.

When I finally climbed down from that joy I saw my mother hiding her tears of disappointment, his father looking furious and my dad apologetic, even though he was the one with hot tea drenching his clothes.

I looked at the boy. He looked different. There was a sense of purpose in his eyes, something mischievous. Was he entertained?

"I want her," he said.

"WHAT?!" his father yelled.

"You told me I would marry her even if I said no. Well, now I say yes," he replied. "Do you say yes?" he yelled at me.

"Yes!" I said with an inappropriate amount of enthusiasm.

"Good."

He stormed out of the room and out of the house. His father behind him trying to keep up.

Then there was only the dripping of the tea from the table to the floor.

Expecting

By Felicity Ramsden

"Jack if it's a boy, Jackie if it's a girl," I grinned, running my hand over my stomach, still flat I wasn't showing yet. Everyone told me I looked amazing considering, but I wanted my bump. I wanted proof that it was really coming. I tried to feel it kicking, but nothing. It was early days, I knew that. Still, I couldn't help but hope.

These days I would sit and wonder what it would be. Would I have a boy or girl? Would it become an astronaut? A firefighter? A teacher? Somewhere deep inside me there were ambitions yet to be made, laughs to be shared, conversations to be had. Oh I couldn't wait until it could talk, whatever it had to say I knew it would be worth listening to.

The day I decided the name I painted its room to be. I chose green, I'd never been a fan of the whole 'blue for a boy and pink for a girl' thing. Plus that meant waiting, and that wasn't something I was prepared to do. On the

wall above the cot I painted a huge gold J, with darker green and blue leaves winding up the side of it. I knew that my husband would love to see that when he got home, but he was away, a soldier. Instead I called my sister.

She came around with her husband, those two always visit together. He held a tin of white paint in his hands when they came in.

"What's that for?" I asked, he gave a small shrug.

"We were on our way back from the shops when you called, we were thinking about doing a spot of decorating too." They looked tired, their three children were nearly grown up now, and I could see the sadness in my sister's eyes. She'd told me she missed the days when they were babies. She was jealous of me, that much was obvious. I basked in it, nobody had ever been jealous of me before.

I took them upstairs to show them what I'd painted. Although they smiled and clapped and told me it was amazing and I'd done a great job there was something forced about it. I was tired, I went to bed not much later and my sister and her husband said they'd show themselves out.

Lying in bed I listened to my brother in law open that tin of paint.

"We can't keep doing this, Eliza," he whispered.

"I know," my sister whispered back, "but I don't know what else we can do."

"I told you, she needs to see a doctor," her husband whispered, and I could just see him taking both her hands in his, looking into her eyes.

"She won't go, she doesn't know there's anything wrong with her," quietly my sister started to cry.

"I'm sorry, darling you know I don't say these things to upset you. But it's been three years now, that's a long time, she can't live in denial forever."

I heard them quietly paint the walls in the room next door. In the morning they would be white again. I clutched his photo to my chest, remembered his last words.

"I will come back for you, my darling," he'd held me tight as he'd said goodbye, ran his hand over my stomach, I'd just been starting to show then.

"By the time you come back, you'll be a father," I told him.

So I had to have this baby. Then he'd come back.

The Terrible Terrible Ms Demetri

By Freya Noble

I had always enjoyed listening to my grandmother tell stories of her extravagant past. She was my mother's life-long shame, with her prodigal nature and blasé morals. At age 19 my grandmother was engaged to be married to a man of great wealth, who owned some big oil company or other. It had been an arranged marriage. Rosalie, my grandmother, not being your typical damsel in distress packed her things into a small travel case and set off for America.

She used to say that hitchhiking your way anywhere was easy provided you had a slit skirt and a good brassiere. It wasn't until much older that the truth of this sunk in for me. Once in America, she picked up odd waitressing jobs in the Big City but she quickly grew bored of the beatnik scene that New York had to offer and headed west to find her calling in the bright lights of Hollywood.

Grandmother used to tell me endless tales of her time in Hollywood, occasionally I would recognise a name and she would reply 'I should hope so my dear, they are terribly terribly famous'. It seemed to me that everywhere my grandmother went she found something new and someone worthy of note but nothing quite stuck out as much as the story of her time being a maid for Cathleen Demetri.

Of all the 'terribly terribly' famous people Rosalie met, Cathleen Demetri was the most terrible. She was a fierce Hollywood bombshell renown for her large parties, her many enemies and the rate at which she went through lovers. On one particularly scorching summer evening my grandmother found herself at one of Cathleen's excessively glamorous pool parties by invite of a man she had known briefly in the back of his Chevy. As I recall my grandmother saying "The party proceeded as most do; drinking, small talk, drinking, gossip, drinking, scandal" what she hadn't accounted for was that she would be embroiled in the evening's biggest scandal.

At some heavenly hour of the morning, before sunrise but long after midnight, she had been caught in bed with the lover of Cathleen by none other than Ms Demetri herself. This, unsurprisingly brought a swift end to the festivities and the people of Hollywood left with the latest fleeting tale of starlet drama. Whilst the masses poured out into beetle-like taxi cabs, my

grandmother and Cathleen remained locked on each other. The next part varied as to what mood my grandmother was in when she was relaying the story however she always said something roughly along the lines of “He wasn’t at all good you know,” and both the women laughed for hours.

Rosalie and Cathleen became fast friends, they had enough in common the conversation never fell dull and enough differences that it never dwindled. The pair got on swimmingly and that morning Cathleen offered Rosalie a job; they became inseparable sisters.

It wasn’t until about a year later that the incident occurred. Cathleen had ended things with yet another on-the-verge-of-famous lover and had informed my grandmother that she would take a dip in the pool to clear her brain. Rosalie concluded that this was one of those moments where a woman required isolation, so she left her employer be and hid from the sweltering heat indoors, returning only to make sure that Cathleen was staying hydrated in all the heat (a bitter irony all things considered). She carried a large metal tray of drinks out to the poolside only to send them clattering to the floor seconds later as she looked upon the lifeless body of her friend, drifting around like a blonde figure of algae freshly settled on the water’s surface.

Cathleen’s death entranced me as a child, I was as captivated with it as the media was back then, and for years it was the mystery that my mind reverted to when it wasn’t working. The official police statement claimed it to be suicide over her now-suddenly-very-famous ex-lover but an autopsy showed signs of struggle and several long bruises on either arm suggested that she’d been held under. My grandmother inherited several of Cathleen’s things, any claimed family suddenly wanting no association when it came to light that she had built up thousands upon thousands of debts. The house, now a cavity of life, was repossessed.

The Four Horsemen

By Georgia Price

Albion had changed.

Was it correct to call it Albion anymore? This wasn’t the same place Arthur had once known. The beach was dark and morbid, hostile towards his presence; Llamrei could sense it and walked nervously, spooking every few

minutes – at the wind, at the waves, at the gulls – at everything and nothing. The same mare who had carried him into the throng of chaos and terror at Camlann was now frightened of her own shadow.

The sea air felt heavy and impatient. There was a storm coming; the winds knew it. They whipped through Llamrei's mane without mercy, throwing strands of wiry grey hair, yellowed with age, into Arthur's face and into her own. He reasoned that it probably wouldn't be much more pleasant to sit astride the horse – at least she was acting as a buffer between him and the weather this way, sporadic though her shelter was.

The pair walked on, horse and rider, partners in life as in death. The sands had only recently been relinquished by the tide; the surface was flat, virgin, inviting – good enough to gallop on. Yet the pair continued at a walk, she swinging her hindquarters towards the wind and bobbing her head in protest, he ignoring her plight in favour of his own difficulty in moving forward. The sea had never been so black.

To the east, Kay spurred Gwyneu on to a gallop. The ground was rough but not unmanageable for a mare like his, facilitating their shared need to blow away the cobwebs – evidence of their fifteen hundred year slumber. The wind hit them head-on, barrelling into Kay's chest, but the little red bay mare simply stretched out her neck, flattened her ears and pushed on. Kay tried to follow suit, but he was armour-clad and thus too bulky for any significant attempt at streamlining. Gwyneu's long neck allowed her to transform into a racehorse at will. It was an enviable trait in any mount.

They rode with a fury and battled the wind, Kay reeling from the long forgotten sensation of adrenaline pulsing through his body. He hadn't felt this way since his last battle. He loved it, longed for it once again; both he and his mount were at their best on the battlefield. Terrible though it was, war made them.

Gawain was riding up from the south, towards the beach. Unlike his friend, he travelled with little urgency – wars could be fought, won and lost all the time. Quest and conquest required a measure of audacity and an opportune moment; it was a waiting game. That sense of daring, of possibility and glory, was something that ran through Gawain's veins – his lifeblood and his purpose. War seemed so serious; conquest had a sense of adventure.

Gringolet snorted, playing with the bit between his teeth and fighting for his head. His chestnut ears, so striking against his snow-white body, fluttered back and forth. The stallion was restless – he longed for adventure, too.

It wouldn't be long, now.

On the horizon was a skinny black horse, ridden by a hunched figure. Percival and his mare crawled along at a halting, almost painful, pace. As Gringolet carried him closer to the spectacle, Gawain was surprised to see that the horse was still standing – she was skin and bones, barely a scrap of flesh left clinging to her body; a thestral without wings. That she could support her rider was solely due to Percival's own famished state.

Their hunger was not for sustenance, but for life itself. The pair had ambition beyond measure – they wanted to be the fastest, the handsomest, the best. Fifteen centuries had not been kind to them.

They rode on together and eventually reached the barren strand that was to be their destination. The inky sea sung them a welcome in its lusty, percussive tone; Arthur and Kay stood ominously on the vast sands, awaiting their arrival in silence.

The old comrades reunited for the first time since Arthur's death. They exchanged pleasantries (or, where Kay was concerned, strained civilities). And then, almost as soon as they had come, they were readying for the off.

The four horsemen had gathered, and the world was not ready to face the turmoil that would follow.

Tides

By Julia Whitehouse

There is a time,
like a pebble plopped
into the sleeping-still lake
where things ripple, and throb,
exposing that serene face as an illusion,
or at least temporary.
It is then that we escape
with a bucket and string to Donaghadee
to swipe lipids off rocks with stones,
attach them to string and dangle them
off in the sea to be nibbled by crabs
that end up in our bucket

festooned with seaweed.
That is until the tide pushes us back
to the car and we return to the city, salty.
The lighthouse winking goodnight.

After the After Party

By Julie Toal

She was lying in the field and the bronze sun sprayed through the barley from the east. She looked. He was still sleeping. She assumed that she was probably sober at this stage - in a contented, mellow kind of calm - but she knew she could be incited back into giddiness if he was still drunk when he awakened. So she waited.

The morning birds called for each other from trees and rooftops nearby and his idle groan joined them. He sat up slowly.

"God, I didn't intend to fall asleep out here. Sorry," there was a slight chuckle, muffled by the cracks in his hungover throat. It seemed as though he had not been so drunk that he couldn't remember coming here with her, and so she smiled.

"That's alright," she said.

"Did you fall asleep?" he asked.

"No," she said.

"Do you want to go back?" he asked.

"Alright," she said.

She, already kneeling, stood quickly and he, unaided by her, followed. The two figures intruded upon the landscape, bending and breaking stalks and casting long shadows through the rising sunlight. Her feet were bare and so when they reached the road, he gave her his shoes. She showed him her soles which were wet and speckled with mud, the petals of daisies clinging to the creases in her pink flesh. He gave them to her anyway and they flopped off her small feet, thudding against the pavement and echoing through the quiet suburban street. Though unintended, it seemed with purpose that his hand, swaying back and forth, brushed against hers. It made her conscious that her heart was beating.

She opened the door to the house where the others were and the noise

returned, feeling unwanted now. They were still sprawled across sofas and rugs, lying on each other more than anything else. One of them was standing with most of the currently open eyes in the room upon him as he laughed about one of the memories of recent days. He turned when they entered.

“And where were you? You’re missing the whole story.”

They sat down where they had been several hours ago and joined with the laughter. Sitting beside him, she felt every point at which her body pressed on his. Another girl stole glances when she could from the other end of the sofa.

Eventually the other girl called him. He did not look back before he stood up and walked outside with her. After a short while, they returned separately, the boy first. He squeezed back into his previous position beside the girl. When he spoke there was a crack in his voice and she caught him often staring distantly. Throughout her conversation with him, he gradually smiled again.

“Do you want a lift home?” he asked eventually.

“Are you going now?” she asked while glancing to the clock. It was 07:15 on a Sunday, which was an ungodly hour to be returning; the night already over and the day not yet begun, Sunday being a day which starts later than all other days.

“Yes,” he said, “I have to be home by nine.”

“Alright,” she said.

They made their exit with two boys and the other girl, who had also been offered a ride. Without instruction, the other girl sat in the front seat. They sped away. Seemingly oblivious to whatever had occurred between them earlier, the girl in front giggled often and showed things on her phone to the driver, which he looked at briefly each time before letting out two laughs and focusing again on the road ahead. One of the boys, having turned green faced and watery eyed, was comically vocalising his distaste for any turns or bumps in the road.

Swiftly, countryside was all that surrounded them. Field after field sprawled up the hills, along with sportswear outlets and abandoned petrol stations with flip dials. The city faded in below them, distant and hazy with a modest skyline.

The driver left the girl in the front home first. As she went, he turned to the back.

“You come sit up here now,” he said.

“Okay,” the girl replied.

They drove off again and she did not look at him much. But smiled gently.

As she approached home there was a stillness of paradise over the street and a golden glow crept over every obstruction to the horizon. She got out and thanked him. He nodded and waited a short while and then he drove away.

Four, Two, Three

By Katherine Sturt-Scobie

Upon a cloud she watched with glee
Smiling, laughing golden wreathed
She called to man
Listen, hear
For I can tell you what you'll be;
From licking ground you grew and changed
Back bent tall
And proud became
You were a child
So new and bright
But then you grew
To the gold starlight
The moon rolled in amongst the silver clouds
In shimmering splendour was your shroud

Upon a cloud she watched with glee
Smiling, laughing golden wreathed
She called to man
Listen, hear
For I can tell you what you'll be;
From darkness light came on the day
Then roaring oceans came to play
The rolling pastures next arose
And sleepy lions began to doze
By the leering willow
Stroking ground
Was the place where you were found?
Bleating like a lonely lamb

The innocence, heroic sounds

Upon a cloud she watched with glee
Smiling, laughing golden wreathed
She called to man
Listen, hear
For I can tell you what you'll be;
Deceived by the creature doomed to lust
After the blood of your children must
Be sworn as enemies forevermore
Banished in lands they will explore
I loved you like a child of mine
For reasons I have yet designed
And if my love can thus withstand
The hatred in your eyes you brand.

Upon a cloud I watch in fear
Terrorized by what is here,
I called to man
So many times
But they never listen
Never hear.
So I linger always near.

Fortuna

By Kym Deyn

Shall I read of the French school?
Is that what we do, now?
I don't keep up with the times,
Tarot: apparently out of fashion
Lenormand, moving to Grand Jeu,
Playing cards made by De La Rue
Waite is turning in his grave
Madame reads with a piquet

WICKED YOUNG WRITER AWARDS 2016

“Marseilles is the only thing
Worth your time” she says

Madame is a Guru, a Sage
1/16th Romany, and a grandmother
Who, when pushed, Madame will claim,
Is descended from Russian royalty

We have Anastasia in the room
Séance, Ouija, too heavy a tool
Minchiate, all 97, lay unused
Tarrochi gathering dust
Cross her palm with silver
And she will guide,
Summon Cleopatra in this sacred
Hour, and pray along the Nile
This rampant exoticism is the
Fetish of the esoteric,
Those who claim the truth is
Cabbalistic

Madame will tell us of the old ways
In a voice that isn't hers, eyes rolled back
Shadows flitting across the room
Grey and red and black
She will clutch amulets, trinkets
Items of protection
In this moment of possession
Where she speaks in tongues
Laughs and smokes

And then! She will change again,
With an accent broad and wide
Talk of England,
The Druids in Anglesey
And she, she is Boudicca
Queen of the Iceni

Cast your circle, begin your rites
Madame speaks of that unbroken line
Knowledge passed down, from John Dee
To Gardner and to Crowley
Secrets from the Freemasons,
The Rosecrutions, the rosy cross
And alchemy

She is Eliot's Sosostris,
Her wicked cards tell no lies
If you want proof, you will find
Her house, a simple thing,
Victorian terrace, sign outside
Her loyal students visit at night
Where she shows them how to bridge the gap
Between the mortal and the divine

Sage smoke thickly burns
In that crystal-strewn drawing room
For a price she'll tell you
What you want to know
But Caveat Emptor!
Haven't you heard?
There is nothing worse
Than getting what you wish for

Highly Commended

Clouding the Future

By Laurence Sullivan

It's hypnotising, I suppose that's why I stuck with cigars – the way the smoke so carelessly shifts and fills the empty space. I get lost in it, the knowledge

that I'm producing such spectral beauty – it wouldn't exist without my breath. Even while the world collapses around me, as people get caught up in creating whirlwinds with their words. There I am. Lost in my own mist, having sailed into the eye of the storm.

My reign is over, they say. My foreign bank accounts will tide me over, but I have to leave now. I say nothing. It all washes over me, they'll come and I'll die – that's all there is to it. There will be no dramatic conclusion, no trial or mercy, they have grown tired of me and so I must pay for my crimes – it's only fair. I shan't allow myself to be the victim of some zealotry assassin in five years time. This is it. It ends here.

The smoke almost covers the revolutionaries through the window, like a fine shroud, a cowl over the future. It's so easy for them to judge me. They starved while I feasted. I danced at balls while they fought each other for pittance. I slept while they cried. How could I have ever understood their suffering, when I had everything I could ever desire? There, that was my mistake. Empathy. I've never possessed it.

"Your Majesty," a voice pulls me from my world and back into the realm of the waking. "We have to leave now!"

I say nothing.

"They're in the palace grounds!" The man paces and points madly at the window. "If we don't leave now there'll never be another chance!"

"So be it," I reply, listlessly...

The man stands tall, upright – as though my words have pierced through his soul. He is taken by surprise, annoyed, and baffled all at once. "You want to die here?"

"If that is what my people want for me."

"You've never given a damn what they've wanted before!" he shouts, rushing over to my seat as though he were going to thrust a knife into my heart.

"Hence why I must die." I rise and push the man gently away.

I do not even know this creature, doubtless one of the many governors who has been employed in my stead – one of the few loyalists who have yet to bid a hasty retreat without me. Most fled the moment the tide turned against me, I would have done the same in their position. I cannot understand why anyone would want to stand by my side, the only thing they stand to gain is a date with Death – and He never forgets a soul.

There's a sudden crash outside, quickly followed by the deafening

cacophony of a thousand voices shouting in unison. I see the blood drain from my companion's face as it dawns on him what they're chanting. They bay for everybody's blood – not just my own.

“Go...” I whisper softly under my breath.

I do not turn to see the man leave, but I hear his shoes slap against the marble floor on his way out. Not a minute later, I hear my helicopter fly overhead and now know that there is no other means of escape. I am alone in my palace, save for my Royal Guard, ruling over an empire of shadows and ash.

I walk over to the window and feel my cigar almost weightless in my hand – its comforting warmth becoming dying embers. For now, though, the future is still misty – still shrouded in smoke – and ash stains my marble underfoot. I begin to wish I could disperse like the smoke, too. Evaporate into the air and escape my fate. I know I cannot. History will remember me for many things, but cowardice shall not be among them. I will be noble in the face of death – I have to reclaim something at the end.

I take one final inhalation of my cigar and then let it drop limply to my side, as the cries of my people grow too loud to even think anymore. Then I see the cigar has run out, I gaze down as its last breath of life is finally extinguished – nothing left to cover the window into my future. Now judgment is at hand, they flood into my palace as my guards abandon their posts. Nothing left to hide the future – let them come...

Glass Houses

By Liam Laing

“This one is Hillary. She lives on her own, but she doesn't mind because she loves dancing in the snow.” Jordan explained to his mother for the fourth time this week. He tugged and tugged at her hand attentively to make sure she was paying attention.

“She's an ice skater, mammy, did you know? Look at her skates!” He pointed out the sharp-looking blade at either end of the tall, silver woman's feet. Her face was even less than a blank expression, but she was happy in her Glass House. She told Jordan she was!

“Oh, really?” His mother ruffled his short golden hair, smiling at him as

she pretended she hadn't been told this several times before.

"And this one is Adam and Chelsea. They're best friends, but not boyfriend and girlfriend." Jordan had to cover his mouth to hide his giggling. Adam and Chelsea were dressed in the same colour clothing: they both wore a thick red coat with black buttons running down the middle, black trousers and light brown boots with black laces. The only difference was that Adam's hair was short, and Chelsea's was long and tied up. Adam wore a blue striped woolly hat, while Chelsea wore a pink striped woolly hat, both had a fluffy ball attached to the top.

Jordan leant in to take a closer look at them, letting go of his mother's hand so he could gaze into the dome. He didn't like to shake the Snow Globes for fear of scaring the people who lived inside. He may have been only six, but he had a large heart. He loved to collect Snow Globes and share his own home with the residents he called "small people". As his mother brought a new one home for him, he would carefully place it next to the latest Globe, and instinctively know both their name and story.

The latest addition to the family was Marvin and his Border Collie dog, Gavin. They sat together on a park bench and smiled as they watched snow drifted by freely.

"You guys must be cold!" He said to the pair.

But of all the Glass Houses that Jordan had, one of them was his favourite, and he moved on to inspect it closely, this time without dragging his mother over to visit; this globe had a shiny glass dome and a light blue base decorated in tiny specks of glitter of various colours, and in the centre, through the thick of the white, was a boy who stood alone with his hands deep in his pockets, his head down and hood up. His navy blue coat was exactly like the one Jordan wore almost every day, and he was around the same age. Jordan knew he was, because he just knew.

Jordan's mother often found her son talking to the boy that Jordan didn't name. He would often talk about his day at school, what was making him happy, what was making him sad, and most upsetting to his caring mother: how he wished he had friends – and he did this almost every night. However, that night was different; she found Jordan kneeling on the carpet in the living room in his red pyjamas, sobbing his eyes out whilst hugging his favourite Snow Globe.

"What's wrong, Jordan?!" His mother instinctively ran over and clutched Jordan close to her, wanting nothing more than to make it all better. But she

couldn't this time.

"I just wish they would wave back at me." He wept as he slowly waved his tiny hand at the small boy inside of the glass house, who kept his hands in his pockets. Jordan thought the boy's hands were even deeper in his pockets than before.

"Come on," His mother began, wiping the tears away from Jordan's soft cheeks. "Let's go to bed. You can stay in my room." She smiled down at him, and he smiled back. And for a moment, he felt better.

Jordan then carefully placed the small boy back in his place amongst the others, and left the room hand in hand with his mother, closing the door behind them to head off to sleep.

But just as Jordan had turned his back on the Snow Globes, the small boy lifted his head, took his right hand out of his pocket, and waved goodnight to Jordan just before the door clicked closed, just like all the residents of the Glass Houses had done every night since the first day they were brought home.

Stranger Under Streetlamps

By Lottie Carter

Sara turned her coat collar up against the bite of cold night air, frowning at the deserted street before her. Work had finished far too late and she wanted nothing more than to go home to a cup of tea, a warm bed and her three sleeping children.

A gust of wind tore past Sara and snatched the breath from her lips, causing her jaw to clench and her arms to tighten around her shoulders. She cursed her morning self for not taking the car; home was only a ten-minute walk away but those ten minutes were almost unbearable in the death embrace of winter.

Ahead of her, a flickering street lamp caught Sara's attention long enough for her to see somebody step into the light. They were too far off to see clearly, but Sara could see their face looking in her direction, the burn of their gaze on her skin, her gut twisting: something was not quite right. She slowed down, wondering if she could subtly cross the street, maybe turn left and slip down a back alley without being followed... No, it was too risky- at least this road

was lit, and if the stranger came too close, she could always make a run for the off-licence around the corner.

Sara reached into her pocket and clutched her phone, her thumb hovering over speed dial, her eyes set on the figure under the street lamp. She was just about to press call when the person abruptly turned and hurried off, going further down the road, away from Sara.

Relief swept through her and she let out a breath she had not known she was holding. Sara waited a few seconds for the stranger to put some distance between the two of them, then picked up her pace, thoughts of home once more occupying her mind. Up ahead, she caught the figure glance back at her and increase their own speed, striding away, reminding Sara of her own wariness.

Maybe they were just like her, Sara mused. Maybe they had thought she was the one to be afraid of, and were now rushing down the road, checking that they were not being followed. Grinning at her feet with the thought of it, Sara crossed the road when it veered left, then followed the pathway to her house.

When she looked up, she found the surrounding streets empty again, no trace of the other person in sight. They must have carried on along the road, reasoned Sara as she walked up the paving to her front door, fishing for keys in her handbag. All the lights in the house were out; everyone was sleeping.

At the door she came nose to nose with her reflection, her hand still digging for the keys- where had she put them, they had been in there last time she checked-

And then her reflection blinked, and Sara felt her blood being replaced with dread.

The woman behind the door was not her.

The woman inside her house was not her.

Sara tipped her bag upside down, spilling the contents all over the floor, desperate. Glancing up, she saw the woman, raise one hand, the keys dancing on the end of an outstretched finger. She could only watch as the woman- the stranger- grinned, moonlight flashing off the kitchen knife she held aloft, before backing away from the door.

Panic took control and she was screaming, beating at the door with her fists while the woman inside disappeared up the stairs, where her children lay sleeping.

Hunted

By Madeleine Wagner

Night obscures and illuminates.

He is a hunter, and the city is his forest.

He spirals out from the central streets, roaming until he finds his favoured grounds. Setting the river behind him, he has woven away from the throngs of midnight revellers until their clamour and the traffic's rubied glare have just become a background hum.

These roads are hushed, buildings darkened, a soothing stillness in this desolation. The darkest hour has passed, but dawn is hours away. A lone bird tries to cajole it on. Still, shadows frolic beneath the glow of the streetlamps, like sunlight fracturing through trees.

The knife sits heavy in his pocket, steel impatience and expectation.

He waits.

And there she is. His prey.

She is flanked by two friends, all bare legs and bare arms, somehow impervious to the cold. From his vantage point, he soaks in all of her. He is ravenous.

The three of them fall to a halt, dawdling at the street corner. They part ways there, enveloping one another in fleeting hugs and a last echo of soft laughter. As her friends peel away out of sight, so does the age from her. It is clear, now, that she is still a child. Years have suddenly been shed, cast off like autumn leaves. In isolation, she is not only younger but smaller too, her shoulders hunched, head bowed, shrunk into herself.

She continues on her way and he slinks after, his gaze tracing the arc of her neck. She trembles, apprehension trickling down her spine: he might have

sparked it. The power of his gaze, his presence alone. This is what he revels in.

The breeze catches her hair as her head turns, finally succumbing to a worried glance. Doe eyes latch onto him. In this moment, they both know that this is only a game to one of them.

Will she bolt?

Their paces quicken in such sync that it is impossible to tell who has spurred the other, which is action and which response. She crosses the road in a flurry of footsteps. Heartbeats race. Not a car in sight. He follows. Soon he has driven her off course in panic, and it gives him the advantage he needs to catch up. She is forced to slow down, surveying the street wildly and finding no comfort in brick walls, flickering streetlamps, the disused row of shopfronts. The dead end.

Flushed out, she turns to face him. Her expression is austere, as though she has decided not to see him.

“Don’t.” She commands. A warning, or a plea?

He laughs in the face of it, and lunges forwards to seize her by the arm, fingers sinking savagely into skin

Pain explodes outwards.

He flings himself backwards she is released but it doesn’t stop. Writhing. Burning.

His reflection ripples before him in the grimy glass, but the whites of his eyes roll: these spasms are blinding, he is losing all sight of himself. Agony transforms him. He cannot he does not fit in his own skin. Limbs and organs, all distorted. Swaying on his feet, he pitches forwards, head hanging heavy and the world awirl around him.

Next, a sharper pain, piercing from the inside out. Something is sprouting from his skull. Antlers grow like branches; his hands try in vain to press them down. No this is a trick there is nothing there to see... but he can feel it all

the same, the protruding velvet bone. Part of him now.

He is too consumed to hear howling sirens and baying hounds converge.

What, he tries to say, what have you done? No matter how he roars, he can force no sound out. He'd tear the words right from his throat would claw at his skin and rip his insides out but he can no longer even feel his hands.

He falls to all fours, throws his head back to the stars. They are too distant, oblivious to his agony. The moon, closer and more luminous, stares balefully.

When his gaze tumbles to earth again in terror, the girl is still standing there, unmoved.

He is trapped beneath her scrutiny: every second she lingers on him is his torture prolonged, invisible jaws sinking into flesh, another lifetime of being wrenched apart raw.

At last, her eyes meet his.

She smiles.

The Diary of Hollie Mandeville

By Alex Smith

Saturday

This afternoon Mum and Dad made me go and sit in my room as they watched the news and listened to the radio. I know they're only trying to protect me but it's no use. I know about Juvenile Virus, of course I do. It's all over the internet. People are posting videos of the infected taking down innocent people and biting them. At first I didn't believe it but . . . they're everywhere.

Before they told me to go to my room they told me they loved me. They told me that everything was going to be okay. They told me not to worry.

But I can't think of anything they could've said to terrify me more.

Monday

Aunt Julie was screeching when she arrived. She screamed about an 'Unpure' touching her. He had the nerve to bite her, that's how she put it. She wailed and cried about getting an infection and how she couldn't go to the hospital because they were overrun with 'Unpures'.

Nothing Dad or Uncle Owen could say calmed her down. She just wouldn't be quiet. I stood against the wall, watching them rush around her like she was so used to.

Cousin Henry had his normal face of disgust on as he leant in the doorway, crossing his arms, just observing the situation as though it was beneath him. As if it didn't matter to him one jot that his mother had been bitten by what I suppose we're calling an Unpure.

Did it not dawn on him that she was going to die? No one had survived the virus from what I knew. Did it not bother him? Not even a little?

Thursday

An Unpure came up to the house this afternoon. I'd never seen one in real life until now. Its skin was falling away and ripped and blue and black and red. It had blood dribbling down its mouth and it growled like an animal, lashing out at the windows trying to reach us.

Dad and Uncle Owen grabbed baseball bats and cricket bats and other 'weapons' from the garage. Their faces were grave when they rushed out there.

I couldn't look. But I could hear.

I heard the crunch, the crack, the squelch.

And I only just held my stomach.

Saturday

Everyone's been watching Aunt Julie. They were kidding themselves it wasn't the virus but of course it is. She was bitten. The man on the news had said that if you get bitten you get the virus one-hundred percent of the time. How can you argue with one-hundred percent?

Well now that she's shivering and vomiting and has an outrageous fever, they finally believe that this is it. This truly is it.

Sunday

Today Aunt Julie has given up the will to fight. She can't seem to sit up anymore. She's lost all energy to scold.

That scares me more than the Unpure that came to the window to see what all the fuss was about.

I feel like I should be writing more. Like I should be attempting to make a note of every little thing that's happening. It seems the world is stuck in this horrific apocalypse and someone should know what happened.

But who?

Is it stupid of me to think that writing in my journal could help future generations? Who would I help exactly? Everyone would know about the Unpures. They would know that people got bitten, got sick, and died. I wouldn't be telling anyone something they didn't already know.

So why am I bothering to write at all? Because I always have? Seems stupid now. I used to write about Mum and Dad and school and . . . stupid things. Things that didn't actually matter.

The truth is, I'm writing this to stay alive. If someone picks up my words and reads them I'll be alive somewhere whatever happens.

I've still got my fingers crossed that this all goes away. Every night I climb into bed, convincing myself it will all be over when I wake up.

One of these days, that might happen.

Or one of these days, we'll all be dead.

I roll the rucksack off my back and start towards the boxes, unzipping my bag and pulling out a large knife. Up close, the boxes are much smaller and the smell of death much stronger. Maybe I'm not alone.

Vanguard

By Rachel Mason

We have become ghosts in this place,
in the passing of the years.
Time has swallowed us whole.
I am not dead
but I mourn for a life already lived,
the immutable past.

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I remember youth -
not with false nostalgia
but for what it was.
Struggle and striving and pain
but with so much hope,
indomitable.

We were warriors for peace
for the idea that we could be better
than what came before.
What are we now?
Relics,
while the new warriors reforge our armour.
The same battles in a new skin,
still striving for settlement,
for the peace we thought we'd won.

Hope is innocence in a way;
a belief that love will in time
overcome darkness.

I lost that somewhere along the journey,
when I realised I wasn't following a road
with twists and turns and forks
to choose my path,
but an ocean
without stars or landmarks to navigate by.
Just distant horizons, all around,
whose ends become their beginnings.
Any direction to travel,
if you have a boat
or know how to swim,
and if you can ride out the waves.

They don't see it yet.
Or perhaps they do -
perhaps the living are wiser than this ghost

and they will become something different;
learn to change the winds, not trust them.

Or better yet
to break the patterns we left them with -
not to walk or sail or swim
but fly;
work for a world that needs no warriors.

Breathe

By Rachel Patterson

The word, although only said in a whisper, echoed around my head, bouncing of each wall in that empty, metaphorical room. I could feel a bright light shining into my eyes, causing the back of my eyelids to glow a strange orange-red, yet, I couldn't open my eyes. It was like they were glued shut. I heard the whisper again.

Come on...breathe dammit. Breathe!

I tried to concentrate on what the voice told me to do. I filled my lungs slowly with air, ignoring the pain that went with this strange sensation. As I exhaled, I felt the glue holding my eyes shut loosen slightly. I continued on to take a few deep breaths, feeling my eyes get closer to opening every time. The voice in the room obviously noticed; I heard them let out a small, yet somewhat manic laugh.

Good...now wake up!

With that command, my eyes flew open, and I sat bolt upright. The bright light bounced off the pristine white walls, and another was positioned directly over my head. My eyes scanned the room, trying their best to adjust to the new surroundings. The room was empty. There were six or seven other beds around me, made of what looked like a flimsy metal, and a paper-thin mattress. All of them were empty.

It was then that I realised. The room was empty. Who had been talking to me? I knew it was a voice I recognised, someone I had once been close to. But I just couldn't put my finger on whom, and that panicked me. Was I just imagining the voice? Where was I? And why was I here? My breathing quickened, causing the machines that I was hooked to to angrily whir and beep at me. I heard voices from the next room.

He's awake!

I assumed that the 'he' was in fact me, as about nine nurses all came running into the room, followed by a doctor. They all began to talk at once, asking me questions, checking the machines and their notes on little grey clipboards. I just lay there, being poked and prodded, staring at the patterned roof above me.

Mr Johnson? Can you hear me?

By this point, the doctor had moved to stand beside me, holding his clipboard and looking at me intently. I guess he needed answers. I just nodded.

Ah good, I'm glad to see you're awake. How are you feeling Mr Johnson?

I shrugged. I didn't really know how I felt. There was a lot of pain that I was only just beginning to notice; mostly in my head and chest. I was confused, and scared, not that I was ever going to admit that.

Mr Johnson do you think you could talk to me?

Yeah.

My own voice made me jump. It was like when you wake up in the morning, and talk for the first time, only to notice that your voice is still tainted with sleep. It was like that, but as if I'd been asleep for weeks. And maybe I had.

Thank you Mr Johnson. Now I'd like you to tell me as much as you can remember from your...incident.

I opened my mouth to speak, but nothing came out. My incident? What incident? Was that what caused me to be in here? Was I injured? My hand instinctively moved to my chest, fingers brushing across stitches that held together a long cut.

Ouch...

Yes I wouldn't touch that if I were you. Do you remember any of what happened?

I shook my head.

Ah okay... well I'm going to leave you for a while, just so you can calm yourself down alright? If you need anything just press the alarm switch.

And with that, the room was empty again. Just me, my thoughts, and that strange voice in my head.

Good job, pretending you don't remember me. Why didn't I think of that?

Who was that? I frowned, causing the pain in my forehead to increase. I gently brushed my fingertips over where the pain centred, feeling more stitches. What happened to me?

You're being over dramatic; it's just a few stitches. Stop pretending you don't know me you pathetic little boy. Pretending won't change anything!

I forced my brain to focus on the voice, flicking through my memories like the pages of a worn down, distant book. My brain strained, thinking back to the darkest depths of my most repressed memories. That's when it hit me.

Emily.

Beautiful Moments

By Shannon Perry

Think of the true beauty in the world,
where you find that artistry doesn't need to fit expectations that have been
furled.

I find mine in captivating laughter of babies; which reduces me to tears,
not those of sadness or melancholy - but of overwhelm as their giggles enter
my ears,
because there is nothing more exquisite than the mere notion of existing and
of life,
the feelings of love and hope in my heart are strife.

What about beauty in those who refuse to give up, ever?
I often wonder how in the world people grow such seraphic strength within
and keep it forever!
They get knocked down over and over again,
yet time after time they get back up, pushing aside their pain.

These elegant people keep moving forward - some have no choice,
but they prove the only way is up and they do not waste their time; instead
they have an active voice.
They are inexplicably unstoppable,
and are the true essence of beauty - and are in fact unbreakable.

Or what about the beauty of fate?
The pulchritude of chance encounters await.
That moment when you meet someone special and become star-crossed
lovers, and recognise you both have an exceptional purpose; and a connection
that hovers.
A time when your eyes lock and your souls connect?
The magnificence in these bespoke experiences erect.
To share your journey in another's grace,
and get to encounter their beautiful embrace.

The Woman in White

By Sophie-Louise Howat

Today is the first day in many years that I've brought myself to look out of the window of the top floor room that was once my study. As I do so, so strong is my recollection of that terrible day that I can still clearly see my granddaughter, Elise, who was named after me, playing in the garden below with my neighbour's daughter, Amy who, like Elise, had just celebrated her eighth birthday.

Simultaneously, my thoughts turn to the time, nearly fifty years before, when, at the age of eight, I visited my grandmother's farm, La Ferme de Haut, in Jersey. Straight away before me, I see myself skipping along the cliff path above the farm house, the air filled with the scent of bluebells, thick amongst the bracken.

It was then that I had sighted the woman in white, close to the cliff edge. I was drawn to her, and now I was so close that I could see the waves crashing on the rocks far below. The woman held out a posy of bluebells with the words, 'Come, Elise, we will be together forever'. As I took the flowers from her hand, my attention was caught by my mother's calls. She had seen me on the cliff edge and was rushing frantically to my side. I turned back to the woman in white but she was nowhere to be seen.

"It's alright, mum," I said, "I was with a lady in a white dress. Look, she gave me these," and I handed the bluebells to her.

Soon after, we returned to our home in leafy Hampstead, where I live to this day.

Many years passed before I understood why my mother had not allowed me to visit Jersey again. I had just obtained my doctorate and I decided to take a short break in Jersey. It was then that my grandmother recounted to me the legend of the woman in white. Neither she nor my mother had wished to tell me when I was a child, but ever since the cholera epidemic in the Spring of 1823, which claimed so many lives in Jersey, the woman in white had been seen many times on the cliff path above La Ferme de Haut, when the bluebells were in blossom. The story was that the whole household of La Ferme de Haut had succumbed to cholera, which took the life of the farmer's eight-year-old daughter, Elise. His wife who, although very near death, had

survived, could not bring herself to believe that her daughter had died. In the days that followed, she lost her mind, and was seen, in her long, white nightdress, amongst the bluebells, where her daughter had loved to play, calling for Elise. Distaught, and out of her mind when she could not find her daughter, she had flung herself from the cliff-top to the rocks below.

I only returned to Jersey once more, to wind up my grandmother's estate. I sold the farm to Mr and Mrs Le Chevalier, descendants of the original owners, in whose family the farm had been held for centuries. I gave them my address in Hampstead in case any matters pertinent to my grandmother's estate arose, but I never had cause to hear from them.

Why I had turned my eyes away from Elise and Amy, I can no longer recall, but when I returned my gaze, I could see only Amy. I rushed down to the garden only to be told by Amy that Elise had been called to the garden gate by a woman in a long, white dress, who had said to her, 'Come, Elise, we will be together forever'. I ran to the gate but neither the woman nor Elise could be seen anywhere in the road. On the ground by the gate, I found a posy of bluebells.

It is now so many years since Elise's disappearance. For a long time, the police did not give up hope of tracing the woman in the white dress, but I always knew that we would never see Elise again.

I am holding in my hand a letter which I have just received from Amy to announce that she is expecting a baby girl and that she and her husband have decided to name her Elise, in memory of her childhood friend. As I pick up my pen in reply, I feel compelled to tell her to choose any name, but not Elise.

One Hundred Roses Sent to Sea

By Zoe Screti

The grey waves crested with ivory foam crashed violently against the cliffs, the roar of the wind deafening, the salted spray biting cold. Winter on the Scottish coastline was never for the faint-hearted; it took great hardiness to survive in the face of nature's most dramatic and inhospitable period. Yet, here I stood, the sea spray numbing my face, the wind tearing my hair from its pins, the salty water saturating my skirts and petticoats.

I grasped at the shawl around my shoulders, drawing it closer as though

its grip on my shoulders were as vital as the air in my lungs. I trembled uncontrollably, the cold permeating my bones, bringing with it pain so severe that it felt as though my bones were breaking, fracturing with every howl of the wind, every crash of a wave, every cry of a gull being tossed in the tumultuous skies. The village thought I was insane, no one stopped to ask me how I was on the way to market anymore, mothers pulled their children away from me when I walked past, heavy silences fell when I walked into a room. There were whispers that I was a witch, that I stood fast on the shore casting enchantments, speaking to spirits who guided me to do evil things. They did not know I was there for love.

Love, that illusory emotion, as fleeting as a will-o'-the-wisp. The finest enchantment of mankind. We all walk through life seeking it, desiring it with every fibre of our being, heralding it as life's most beautiful state. Yet the beauty of a rose is always contrasted by its thorns. I endured their keen prick now as my heart felt as though it were bound in briars. He should be back by now. He should never have gone.

I gazed wistfully out at the horizon, desperately seeking any sign that he was there, that his heart was beating still in time with my own, that he had not sought a home with the shimmering fish that glimmered beneath the waves when the sun was high and the weather warm. I did not know how long I had stood there, sinking slowly into the sand, unaware of my own fragility against the power of nature. What I did know was that one hundred days had passed since I had seen him last, since he had put his life in the hands of that wooden vessel, the thought of which filled me with dread as they sky turned from slate-grey to jet black, illuminated only by violent, flashes of brilliantly white lightening that made the clouds grumble and tremble with fear.

I pulled the shawl closer still, grasping at the brooch which adorned it, the delicate silver rose, a parting gift from the one who had stolen my heart. Please, I begged, although of whom I did not know, please bring him home, keep him safe, keep him alive.

I could not have known then that he was looking back at me across the horizon, too far apart to see me but close enough in spirit to know I was there. That though the waves were crashing against his boat as violently as they were the cliffs beneath which I was nestled and although the boat was creaking and rocking uncontrollably he was on the deck, taking from his sodden bag another rose and casting its delicate form into the swirling sea which consumed it greedily, sweeping it swiftly away from him. I could not

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have known then that that rose was the one hundredth he had cast away in the hopes it would reach me, in the hopes I would not forgo my love for him through fear that he was lost. I could not have known that each rose which found its way onto the golden sands I endured every day was a symbol of his love for me, carrying one simple message that had the power to conquer the forces of nature, the fear of mankind, the pain in my chest: I love you, my dearest. I love you.